

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 9A

14 May 1987

Report: Soviets harass embassy staff

J By Gregory Spears
Inquirer Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Soviet Union is harassing employees of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in an effort to hurt morale and impede work there, according to a congressional report issued yesterday.

Tactics include building a fence between the employees' apartments and offices to make them walk in a muddy street each day and allowing contaminated drinking water to be piped into the embassy, according to the report by Reps. Daniel A. Mica (D., Fla.) and Olympia Snowe (R., Maine).

The two members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee inspected the embassy building from April 5 through 8 and interviewed 35 embassy employees.

Their 19-page report found "appalling" gaps in the embassy's technical security system, including large "blind spots" along the embassy's perimeter where Soviets could enter the grounds unobserved.

Marine guards who stood watch over the embassy's electronic security system were loosely supervised and rarely subject to spot checks, although it was "common knowledge" that some were socializing with Soviet women, the report said.

Mica and Snowe traveled to Moscow in the wake of allegations that two Marine guards allowed Soviet agents into top-secret sections of the embassy in exchange for sexual favors. The entire detachment of 28 guards was ordered home to assist in the investigation.

Embassy employees had a lax attitude about security, partly because then-U.S. Ambassador Arthur A. Hartman downplayed security problems and turned aside proposals to improve security, according to the report. Hartman has said that he resents suggestions that he neglected security matters and has insisted that he continually tried to improve security measures.

Adding to the problems was the low morale of embassy employees,

the report said. "Contributing to low morale is the clearly hostile environment in which American personnel are compelled to live and work," the report stated.

It said Soviet representatives had entered the residences of U.S. Embassy employees while they were away and opened their windows in mid-winter, freezing radiator pipes that burst and caused heavy water damage.

Last winter, the embassy's drinking water was found to be contaminated by a sewage leak, the report said. "The U.S. Embassy building is the only building in the area affected by contamination," the report went on. "Today the water is still not fit to drink."

About 40 workers became sick with intestinal parasites from January to March as a result of contaminated drinking water, according to a State Department spokeswoman who asked not to be identified. Most have recovered, she said.

Robert F. Ober Jr., a former embassy employee, said yesterday, "I don't think anyone's made a credible case that the Soviets contaminated our drinking water." Ober said the contamination could have been caused by the unusually cold weather in Moscow last winter, which caused many pipes to burst.

However, Ober, a retired foreign service officer who spent seven years in Moscow, added that U.S. personnel were routinely harassed by the Soviets. "It's a very repressive system. You're often under surveillance and followed. It's unpleasant living, no question about it," he said.

The report concluded that the only way to end the harassment was to treat Soviet government employees working here as badly as U.S. government employees were treated in Moscow.